

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Student Conservation Association, Inc.

**Application ID:** 13ED145269

**Program Name:** SCA AmeriCorps Stewardship Teams: National Direct

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The applicant demonstrates its commitment towards the economically disadvantaged community by placing "special emphasis" "on engaging youth from communities with historically low participation rates: specifically disadvantaged, underserved, at-risk, minority, and tribal populations." The applicant supported its premise in this area by stating that in 2010, the applicant completed its Strategic Plan, which states that it will offer opportunities to a wide variety of youth from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse communities and from urban, suburban and rural communities as well as Tribal communities.

(+) The applicant provides examples of how it enacts its focus of promoting diversity as a top priority through its recruitment, including people of all abilities, by providing reasonable accommodation whenever possible.

(+) The applicant appropriately uses President Obama's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative to document the need for this project. The AGO aligns closely with what the applicant proposes. The AGO initiative is to develop a 21st-century conservation agenda that will protect America's natural and cultural resources, and connect people, especially our nation's youth, to the great outdoors through meaningful service, recreation, service, and educational experiences.

(+) The applicant effectively links/connects childhood obesity which is most often caused by a lack of physical exercise and the need for America to conserve its natural and cultural resources.

(+) The applicant explains that research shows that excessive 'screen time' detracts from social development and concentration, weakens social cohesion, and fosters a dependency on overstimulation.

(+) The applicant referenced research that shows that regular exposure to nature lowers stress, cultivates creativity, and builds self-confidence among youth; the operating premise of its program model.

(+) There are a large number of established national community partners (The Environmental Protection Agency, the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program, The National Fish and Wildlife Association, the

National Park Service, and the National Association of Counties among others). The stature and expertise of these partners will help to assure that there is program support, oversight and use of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices from sources other than the applicant.

(+) The applicant names participating partnerships with various respected and well known agencies nationwide and describes Member activities that clearly align with their overall mission of providing 'hands-on' conservation service and educational programming to promote and cultivate stewardship values and sustainable practices within public lands and communities across the country.

(+) The applicant states that without the support of AmeriCorps, it would be reduced to addressing a much smaller percentage of projects that protect natural and cultural resources and educate youth about lands, waters, wildlife, culture, and sustainable practices.

(+) The applicant provides an impressive amount of explanation and detail on its intended conservation projects with specific Member activities. For example: (1) the Indiana Brownfields Job Training Program, Members will implement green storm water management and water quality improvement features and practices such as placing rain barrels throughout the Marquette Park Lagoon watershed; (2) the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program: Members will serve in community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects such as supporting planning efforts for the design of trails, greenways and bike paths; and, (3) National Fish and Wildlife Program Members from Tribal populations will serve at various Fish and Wildlife host stations in the Great Lakes, Mountain, and Alaskan regions serving on projects like habitat and wildlife monitoring. These programs are representative samples of the several that will be a part of Member activities including several in the States of Alabama, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, and other states.

(+) The applicant thoroughly quantifies its request for Members (e.g., "45 AmeriCorps members will complete vital conservation projects and provide educational programming within our public lands and communities with the goal of engaging youth into these activities").

(+) The applicant described in detail the Member division of services that will be used in its numerous projects and the time period, seasons, and specific projects and program design elements of the overarching components.

(+) The applicant thoroughly describes the impact of the AmeriCorps investment in both quantitative and qualitative terms, including a detailed discussion of sustainability factors and leverage for longer-term effects. The applicant provides impressive examples of the impact of Members' efforts in the performance of field activities, conducting surveys, and implementing awareness and education building programs (e.g., descriptions of its 55-year organizational history of strengthening communities by recruiting volunteers for service-learning projects and public outreach events; reporting that 30,000 people will be reached in awareness and educational events).

(+) The applicant clearly describes the outcomes expected. Members will increase awareness and stewardship by conducting outreach campaigns and educational programming that promote and cultivate conservation and environmentally-conscious practices to 20,000 individuals. Members will protect and improve 300 acres of public or tribal lands in various sites across the country. Members will improve or create 300 miles of public or tribal trails or waterways in various sites across the country.

- (+) Assessment tools to measure the actual output or outcome are described in detail and are varied enough to capture the needed information on the various outcomes. The applicant plans to use partner- and staff-reviewed and approved Member service logs, partner surveys, monthly Member reports, participant surveys as well as quantitative and qualitative data from service logs and surveys.
- (+) The activities the Members will use can be considered to be evidence-informed because the applicant has an impressive 55-year history of successfully training youth for careers in conservation and environmental education programming and (b) in its recently completed AmeriCorps programs, the applicant showed that it engaged 10,591 adults (over the age of 21) and 9,526 youth (age 21 and younger) in similar programs across the country.
- (+) The applicant provides a well-developed description of how results will be evidence-informed and reported (natural and recreational resource mapping and creation of interpretive guides; trail usage surveys for reporting on travel patterns, number of people, group sizes; natural resource inventories, biological surveys).
- (+) The applicant provides strong documentation to show how the preventive measures in which the Members and volunteers are engaged address issues that have been described, based on the environmental aspects of the project and evidence-informed and evidence-based activities (e.g., creating, maintaining or restoring 150 miles of trail and protecting and improving 450 acres of land throughout the targeted areas).
- (-) The applicant did not adequately discuss the economic challenges of the actual communities adjacent to or surrounding its targeted areas in the context of this project, or how the lack or presence of improvements would significantly generate beneficial outcomes in disadvantaged communities.
- (-) The AGO initiative supports the national need; the applicant did not provide any statistical data on the environmental needs either nationally or in a few representative target sites.
- (-) The applicant does not provide documentation that any of the target communities are economically disadvantaged.
- (-) The applicant states that it will seek out individuals who are disadvantaged but does not specify what or who would represent “disadvantaged.”
- (-) The applicant does not provide information to describe whether the targeted communities for its proposed project are economically disadvantaged. Instead, the applicant only discusses engaging youth from disadvantaged and underserved populations as volunteers.
- (-) The applicant does not explain how the target areas for conservation projects were chosen. Nor does it give any data to substantiate the severity of need in the target areas.
- (-) The applicant states that it would only be able to offer a “much smaller percentage of projects” without funding, but does not document the percentage or which programs would be omitted or reduced.
- (-) There is a lack of clarity related to where Members will serve and the numbers that will serve in each location. For example, the applicant (a) states it is “anticipating” service sites to be in Gary Indiana (b) has unnamed sites and an unnamed number of Members associated with the RTCA program and (c) does not provide an approximate

number of Members to serve in the Great Lakes, Alaska, Canyon de Chelly, six national forests, and the Upper Monongahela Water Trail in Pennsylvania.

(-) The applicant proposes to invite disadvantaged youth to become volunteers and serve alongside AmeriCorps members and be supervised by park rangers; however, the applicant does not include the agency's policy for conducting criminal history and child abuse registry checks on staff, volunteers, AmeriCorps member, or park rangers who come into contact with these youth who will be serving.

(-) The applicant does not definitively align the Member slots to the program design. For example, there are several Member activities given, however, the number of Members to be used to achieve the projects are not given for any of the activities.

(-) The applicant states that they anticipate collaborating with the Environmental Protection Agency, Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority and the City of Gary (specific relationships not given), Indiana Brownfield's Job Training Program, etc. It is unclear as to whether the relationships have been confirmed or if they are hopeful to collaborate with these agencies in the future.

(-) The applicant does not discuss what it expects to accomplish by using the AmeriCorps members.

(-) The application is not fully consistent in terms of its description of the targets of acreage and mileage (e.g. 240 miles or acres).

(-) The applicant states that it did not meet program goals related to protecting land in a previous project. While the applicant states that other important activities were performed that were not readily measurable, a similar goal is in the current project.

(-) The applicant does not specifically state what will be different in this new project to make the goal attainable in this year when it was not attainable in the last year other than a vague plan to "re-assess future placements".

(-) The applicant fails to provide quantitative data and evidence to support the need for conservation related projects in the various states (i.e., Indiana, New Mexico, Alaska, and Pennsylvania) where the applicant proposes to provide interventions.

(-) The applicant fails to explain a rationale for how it selected the various conservation sites and states involved in its project.